My Saviour/Jack

He was a big cheery man. My saviour. The pharmacist who give me the job. Having only seen him a few times, arriving late to our ceili. Slipping in with his accordion. Nervous and shy was my impression of him initially.That soon changed over time.

Being twelve years older, he felt fatherly even protective of my fourteen year old self as I weaved through the instructions of the chemist shop. The prescriptions of medicines being the most important to care for. Preventing mistakes when returning them, filled out to the customers. That

assistant job was offered. No doubt asked for by my mother.

Dympna was there for several years. She knew everything there was to know about the shop. Patiently over the weeks tutoring me on all aspects of that lovely bright work world. Known as chemist assistants. Receiving £2 a week was considered a tidy sum of money. Dressed in neat white coats we felt important. I just loved it.

Only the most special friend or relative was allowed entry, past the counter, into the pharmacy. The top shelf held a bright array of coloured liquids and powders.

Green, blue, dark brown all with glass stoppers and thick printed black names on yellow paper labels. All collectable nowadays. Once holding their cures and poisonous contents.

Taking much care always, ensuring the correct potions prescribed were dispensed, we double checked every item with the chemist before handing it over the counter placed in a small paper brown bag.

Mother always got my pay returning into my hand a half crown to spend ‘wisely’ or save for something special. I never got a rise in pay.

On one particular day, Farmer Frank McNally, a man who came in every few weeks to buy animal products. Occasionally getting a prescription filled for an ailing cow. That same day Seamus Rafferty, another country farmer came in with his weekly script. Both men wore caps and wellingtons to their knees. They did look alike. Seamus suffered stomach acid reflux.

It was a busy day. Dympna was off on her holiday week as we looked forward to the end of our day. Quite near closing time Frank returned. I hurried to wrap his bottle, a clear solution for his

ailing cow. Seamus came, almost on the dot of 6pm. Just as we were about to lock the shop. Picking up his script, a clear liquid for his ailment, he wished us a good evening as I let him out bolting the door as he left.

Jack offered me a lift home, which was on his way, saying,”I am glad Seamus called. He does suffer with that stomach of his.” “Oh my god, I have mixed up those scripts,” I blurted out. “That was Seamus I let out. He’s so like Frank.”

Panic set in then as Jack began to curse under his breath. “Look I’ll leave you down home and then drive out to Derrynoose. Think I know where he lives. His address is on the prescription list,” he added fussed and very cross. “Please god he won’t have taken a dose.”

Fretting all evening, I didn’t sleep well that night. Thinking I may have killed Seamus. Might go to jail for murder.

Yes, he did take a large spoonful of that cow remedy. Stating he didn’t feel so good when Jack arrived. Had to go to

the toilet a number of times after. Was feeling a little groggy.

Having brought Seamus a replacement bottle of Dyspeplic medicine, Jack took the ‘Liquid Paraffin’ for cattle constipation and ‘bloating’ away. Took it after expertly letting this sickly man know the possibility that the prescribed liquid was going out of date. That he may have taken too large a dose in one go. Seeing Seamus settled, feeling better, he advised him to wait until morning before resuming of his spoonful dose. This replacement script. The new bottle he give him.

There was no need to contact Frank. The cows medicine for dyspepsia would do no harm. In fact it would act in a similar way as the dosage prescribed was generous. Both men he knew, would not scrutinise the labels.

Our ‘quiet forms’ the next morning soon gave way to laughter as Frank described poor Seamus’ reaction. His own reaction of fright. My horror and dismay. Knowing we could put this incident behind us, we both ensured extra checking. Re-checking of all scripts that left the premises. It never happened again. Not in my lifetime anyway.

Our friendship continued. Jack became a trusted family friend who continued to join our ceili house. Playing his accordion and enjoying the craic.